

John 8:30-59

Disciples Indeed

If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed — v. 31

It's very important in this section of John's gospel that you note whom Jesus is talking to — what designation they're given — and that you remember the purpose for which John wrote his gospel. You'll notice that the ones Jesus is talking to are called *believers*. Look at the beginning of v. 31 *Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him*. And remember that John has written this gospel in order that *ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name*.

Now, bearing in mind that these Jews are called *believers* in v. 31, take a look at what they do in the very last verse of the chapter, v. 59 *Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by*.

Now the scene has not changed between vv. 31 and 59. Christ is addressing the same people at the beginning of this section in chp. 8 as at the end of chp. 8 — and yet these hostile antagonists in v. 59 are called *believers* in v. 31. And once again we find ourselves facing a matter in John's gospel that we've seen before.

Jn. 2:23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast [day], many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. And yet the very next verse says *But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men — they believed, but Jesus didn't commit Himself to them*.

And then in 6:15 we see that their belief in Him is such that they would have taken Him and made Him their king. *When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone*. And now in the section we've just read from (8:30) we're told that *As he spake these words, many believed on him*.

Isn't this a strange phenomenon to find in John's gospel? John's purpose in writing this gospel is to persuade men to believe. And in the course of his presentation of Christ he provides us with instances of many who did believe and yet in the context of their believing we see that they're hostile to Christ. The very ones that would have made Him king back in chp. 6 depart from Him before that chapter is over.

So what exactly is John doing by aiming to produce believers while at the same time giving the account of believers who turn hostile toward Christ? I think this phenomenon in John's gospel is so important because unlike the day in which we live, John wants nothing to do with easy-believism. Isn't that what we have in our day? Hasn't easy-believism characterized much of popular evangelism in our generation? It seems that preachers and evangelists and soul-winners of every sort seek to entice people into saying a prescribed prayer and then call those who prayed such a prayer a Christian. It seems that in our day many look for the slightest excuse to call someone a Christian. If that person can say or do

anything at all to indicate that he knows something about Christ and doesn't try to refute what he knows, then there are many that are perfectly willing to call that man a Christian.

I remember several years ago when I was young in the Lord and we had a team of young people come to the church we were attending at the time to help us do soul winning. There would be a nightly tabulation of how many souls had been won to Christ and there was one young man, in particular, who couldn't be beat in the number of people he could get to pray the sinners prayer. In contrast to this young man there was a young lady who managed to have a lengthy and good conversation with a lost sinner and this young lady was viewed by the others as being derelict in her soul winning duty for actually spending time with a needy soul and actually having a meaningful conversation with that person during which she undoubtedly planted good gospel seeds.

John's gospel shows us clearly and repeatedly that Christ wanted nothing to do with easy believism. There is a quality of faith that Christ was looking for and that John seeks to produce in His gospel. And this quality of faith comes out very clearly when we read the words of Christ in v. 31 *Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.* Underscore that phrase *disciples indeed*. It might be tempting to think that there are disciples of Christ and then there are disciples *indeed*, as if to suggest that the difference between the two is only a comparative issue. There's regular disciples and there's more spiritually minded disciples. The ones that are more spiritually minded are the ones that are disciples indeed.

That's not Christ's meaning, however. This may be one of those instances when our KJ Bibles don't capture the meaning as well as modern English versions. In just about every major modern translation this phrase reads *then are you truly my disciples*. One more obscure translation reads like this: *then are you really my disciples*. The Greek word behind this word *indeed* is the word ἀληθῶς — it means *truly, of a truth, in reality, most certainly*.

And so you see by the Greek definition of this word that Christ is not distinguishing between *believers* and *disciples indeed* as a matter of degree but He's distinguishing them as different in kind. The ones that John calls *believers*, you see, were believers you might say in a natural sense but not in a spiritual sense. That becomes quite clear when you read of the ensuing discussion that takes place between them and Christ and leads to their taking up stones to cast at Christ at the end of the chapter. Whatever you may say regarding their faith or their belief in Christ you could not say that they were *in reality* disciples of Christ or that they were *most certainly* disciples of Christ. Their belief in Christ could not be characterized as saving faith in Christ.

And the question that each one here needs to consider this morning is simply this — can your faith be considered genuine? Are you truly a disciple of Christ? Or to use the KJV word of our text —

Are You a Disciple Indeed?

That's the question I want to help you answer this morning. And should you discover yourself to be what we may call *a natural believer* rather than *a disciple indeed*, then I want you to be able to recognize that truth and deal with it in such a way that you become a disciple indeed. What makes then for a Disciple Indeed? Let's think first of all that:

I. A Disciple Indeed Continues in Christ's Word

Look again at v. 31: *Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.* It becomes quite clear in this statement and in others that a very plain way to distinguish between *natural believers* and *disciples indeed* has to do with that true disciple's connection to the Word of God. *If ye continue in my word*, Christ says. So the evidence of being a disciple indeed, or a true disciple is a continuation in Christ's word.

Christ puts this another way in v. 43: *Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word.* And in v. 47 Christ states the matter again very directly and as a general rule: *He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.* This is not the first time Christ has made this point, nor will this be the last time we find Him making it.

Back in 5:24 we read: *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation.* And a couple of verses later in 5:38: *And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not.* We'll see when we get to chp. 10 that Christ's word is likened to His voice. Perhaps the most well known verse that makes the point we're finding Christ making in our text is found in 10:27 *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.*

Today, of course, we don't hear Christ's voice audibly the way His disciples heard it when Christ walked this earth; but there is a sense, a spiritual sense, in which His voice is heard through His word. When the Spirit of Christ bears witness to the truth of Christ and impresses on the hearts of those who are reading the word of Christ that this person is indeed the Christ of God, then that's how you hear His voice today.

Now, I'm not going to suggest that every time you open your Bible and read it, that you're going to have some subjective mystical experience of Christ but neither am I going to deny that such experiences happen. The most vivid example I can give of such an experience in my own life pertains to the way the Lord called me to preach.

When I began the study of the Bible at BJU I had no notion at all that I might be called to preach. I only knew that I was called to fulfill the desire that was so strong on my heart, the only desire that I had in all the world which was to study the Bible. I didn't know or care where it would lead, I just knew that God had blessed me with that privilege. But towards the end of my time as a student, as my graduation was approaching I was harboring the notion that God could be calling me to preach. And I wanted to make sure that it was God calling me. My feeling even way back then was that there were too many

men in pulpits that shouldn't be there and I had no desire to join their ranks. So during that time I was in prayer often and I was asking God to show me what He wanted me to do and make it known to me that He was calling me to preach — or not. And I remember it was one Sunday morning, we were getting ready for church and in a situation that I have to admit was too common, I was dressed and ready to go and while waiting for the rest of the family to be ready I was dragging my eyes sleepily over my Bible reading for that day and in the process I read the words of Psalm 95: *Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness* (vv. 7,8). And in that instant I suddenly became wide awake.

I knew the word I had been seeking the Lord for was going to come that morning at church. And it did – it came during the Sunday School hour when Dr. Barrett was beginning a study of the book of Joshua. And in Joshua 1:9 the Lord says to Joshua, and I might add that the Holy Spirit said to me: *Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest*. Later that day I revisited that verse and prayed over it and perceived that the verse answered everything my heart wanted to know – is God commanding me? Or am I doing this thing on my own? And in the context of the statement the question is a rhetorical one – yes the Lord was indeed calling Joshua to take the Israelites into the promised land. And along with the command there came word of encouragement as well as a word of promise. *Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed* – there's the encouragement and then comes the promise and what a precious promise it is – *For the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest*.

Now I'm not about to tell you that I have that kind of experience every time I read the Bible. In fact I've come to believe that you need to be very careful when it comes to that kind of experience that you don't psyche yourself into that sort of thing. You need to distinguish whether or not the word has gripped you or you have gripped the word. The word can come to you that vividly and that powerfully but in order for the potential of that sort of thing to happen you must be continually in the Word of God. *If ye continue in my word then are ye my disciples indeed*.

What most often happens is that as you spend time in God's word you find yourself compelled to worship Christ as He's revealed to be the Son of God and the Savior of sinners; and you find yourself gaining assurance of salvation as the Holy Spirit ministers the truth of the gospel of Christ to your soul and you gain the peace of God. And you find yourself gaining guidance from God's word, guidance on how to live, and how to be patient and how to pray and wait on God for His guidance and the timing of His leading.

The benefit of continuing in the word of God is given by Christ in the very next verse, v. 32: *If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; 32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*. Do you see the connection here between the word of Christ and freedom? This is a message all in itself and I'm sure I've preached from this text years ago on the topic of freedom; and in that message I pointed out how freedom is a

spiritual concept before it can become a political concept. There are men who live in a free country, you see, that are nevertheless slaves to sin and there are those that live in countries where men are hunted down and arrested and are persecuted for their faith and yet they're free, because they're spiritually free.

The example of Paul before King Agrippa comes to mind in Acts 26. Paul is the one in custody. Paul is the one bound with chains as he gives his testimony before Festus and King Agrippa and when the word of the gospel convicts Agrippa's heart to the point that he says: *Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian*, Paul says in response in v. 29: *I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds*. Paul, you see, didn't envy them. He wanted them to be like him minus the chains that held him captive. Paul, you see, was free in his heart and in his conscience. He understood that he was a sinner, indeed the chief of sinners, but he also understood that Christ was the Savior of sinners and so in spite of his being held unjustly he nevertheless was free.

And so I want to ask just now – are you a disciple indeed? Do you continue in God's word? Do you read God's word? Do you pray over God's word? Do you commune with Christ over God's word? Are you moved to worship Christ as He's revealed in God's word? The mark of a true or real disciple of Christ is that he continues in God's word.

But let's move on now to consider next that:

II. A Disciple Indeed Does the Works of Abraham

The Jews in their response to Christ's word about freedom assert themselves as being the children of Abraham. Verse 33: *They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?*

If ever there was a statement to reveal the blindness and ignorance of the Jews it was that statement we just read. They must have been ignorant of their history and forgotten that the Jews were slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years. They must have forgotten the history of the Judges during which the Jews were taken captive by neighboring rulers time and again. Did they not know their history of being lead away captive into the land of Assyria and then into the land of Babylon? It seems to me that a good portion of the history of Israel is the history of bondage.

But the real bondage they were in was of a spiritual nature. They were in bondage to sin. So Jesus says to them in v. 34 *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin*. And in connection with their spiritual bondage Christ is very blunt in saying to them in v. 44 *Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it*.

But so far as their lineage to Abraham goes, look at the exchange between Christ and the Pharisees in v. 39 *They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.*

The works of Abraham can be viewed from a two-fold perspective. Both Paul and James make reference to the faith of Abraham. In Rom. 4:1-3 Paul writes: *What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? 2 For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. 3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.*

He believed in God – Christ goes so far as to say in our text in v. 56 that *Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it and was glad.* Commentators say that what Christ is referencing here is that occasion where Abraham was about to offer his son, Isaac, on the altar, but then God stopped him and he discovered a ram caught in a thicket and he offered that ram on the altar instead. And in the sacrifice of that ram on the altar he saw Christ's day by faith and so Christ's righteousness was imputed to him.

So there's Paul's perspective on Abraham and then there's James' perspective on Abraham. James 2:21-23 *Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? 22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? 23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.*

You are aware, I'm sure, that those who fail to study their Bibles with any kind of earnestness think a contradiction is found between Paul and James. Actually they complement each other. Paul is dealing with faith from the perspective of being justified before God and James is dealing with faith from the perspective of demonstrating faith or showing evidence for your faith. James, you could say, was a lot like John in that James, like John, allowed no place for easy believism. If you believe in Christ, your faith will show itself. That's the point that both James and John (and Paul, for that matter in other places) advocate.

And so again the question needs to be considered – are you a disciple indeed? Do you continue in God's word? Do you have the faith of Abraham, who rejoiced to see Christ's day and who not only or merely gave a verbal profession of faith but demonstrated his faith by obedience to God? Is that your faith? Are you truly a disciple of Christ?

So we've seen two marks of those that are disciples indeed. They continue in God's word and they demonstrate the faith of Abraham. It remains for us to consider briefly but most importantly that:

III. A Disciple Indeed Sees the True Deity of Christ

Verse 56 *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.* This is where the contention between the Pharisees and Christ reaches the boiling point. Notice their response to Christ in v. 57 *Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years*

old, and hast thou seen Abraham? A.W. Pink in his commentary makes an interesting observation about Christ from this verse. He notes how Jesus, in truth, was only a little over 30 years old and yet the Jews saw Him as approaching 50. Pink suggests that the strain of all that Christ had done during His earthly ministry made Him look more aged than He really was and so the Jews saw Him as approaching 50 when in fact He was only about 30.

The thing I want you to see now, however, is that in His response to the Jews Christ makes the strongest affirmation yet pertaining to His deity when He says to them in v. 58 *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.* We read earlier in the service today from Exodus 3 where God from the burning bush reveals Himself to Moses by the name of Jehovah – Exod. 3:14 *And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.*

God's name *Jehovah* is derived from the Hebrew of this verse. More modern day commentators call it Yahweh which is another form of the name Jehovah. The point I'm making, now, however, is that we find Christ identifying Himself by that name – *I AM THAT I AM – Before Abraham was, I am.* Like I say, this is a very strong affirmation about Christ made by Christ. And this is what pushed the Jews over the edge – these “believers” now take up stones to cast at Him (v. 59).

This is the dividing line, you could say, between a natural believer and a disciple indeed. A natural believer may say that he believes that Christ actually did perform the miracles that are found in the gospel accounts. They may say they believe that He taught on the sermon on the mount and that His teachings were outstanding. They may go so far as to say they believe He went about doing good but they will not say that He's Jehovah God.

I remember years ago while I was a student at BJ, me and a friend of mine met an alcoholic in a rundown home which was filled with drunkards. We led this one particular drunkard to the Lord and then sought to follow up in our ministry to him. We went so far as to get him to commit himself to a rehabilitation center to help him get over his addiction to alcohol. I learned an important lesson at that time. It seems this man was willing to go through the physical strain of abstaining from alcohol but when he found himself cut off from cigarettes that was more than he could bear. Tobacco had a stronger grip on him than alcohol so he eventually went back to his residence with the other drunkards.

But we didn't give up on him. We continued to visit him and take him to lunch and conduct Bible studies with him. It must have been a couple months later that we dealt with the person of Christ, who He was. We learned to our horror that all the while we had been dealing with this man he had been harboring a wrong view of Christ. His mind had been polluted earlier in his life by the Jehovah's witnesses who had fed him with their false view of Christ. All the while we had dealt with this man he had always been mild mannered and soft spoken but when at last he was confronted with the person of Christ he got angry – so angry in fact that he picked up an lawnmower blade that was laying in the

yard and chased us away with it and from that point on, he didn't want anything to do with us again.

Here, then, is the true dividing line between natural believers and disciples indeed. Natural believers, so to speak, are provoked to anger by the idea of Christ being Jehovah God. This drunkard we dealt with would have fit right in to this crowd of Pharisees that took up stones to cast at Christ.

Disciples indeed are happy to confess the Deity of Christ. He is the Son of God. The Jesus of the New Testament is the Jehovah of the Old Testament. He is the second person of the Trinity. Most gladly do we bow the knee before Him and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

And so we have these 3 very distinct marks of a true disciple – He continues in God's word; he exercises the faith of Abraham and he confesses the truth of Christ that He is the I AM of Scripture, even as He revealed Himself in Jn. 8:58. And so again I want you to examine your heart. Are you a true disciple of Christ based on the marks of a true disciple we've considered this morning? Do you believe in Christ? Will you believe in Christ? May the Holy Spirit Himself press upon your heart the truth of Christ and may all true disciples of Christ rejoice in Him and be glad even as Abraham rejoiced to see His day and was glad.